

A Request for Additional Information on the Myth of the 'Gassing' of the Serbs in the First World War

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The myth of the "gassing" of the Jews during the Second World War is only a recurrence -- or a recycling -- of a myth from the First World War: that of the "gassing" of Serbs by the Germans, the Austrians, and the Bulgarians.

On March 22, 1916, the London Daily Telegraph printed, on its page 7, the following article:

ATROCITIES IN SERBIA 700,000 VICTIMS

ROME, Monday (6:45 p.m.). The Governments of the Allies have secured evidence and documents, which will shortly be published, proving that Austria and Bulgaria have been guilty of horrible crimes in Serbia, where the massacres committed were worse than those perpetrated by Turkey in Armenia.

The Italian government has today published the testimony of two Italian prisoners who escaped from Austria through Serbia, and took refuge in Romania. What these two prisoners saw and learned, however, was nothing compared with the evidence supplied by the Serbians themselves, and communicated by M. Pasitch to the Italian Government and to the Pope. According to reliable information, the victims of the Austrians and Bulgarians exceeded 700,000. Whole districts, with towns and villages, have been depopulated by massacres. Women, children, and old men were shut up in the churches by the Austrians, and either stabbed with the bayonet or suffocated by means of asphyxiating gas. In one church in Belgrade 3,000 women, children, and old men were thus suffocated. Serbian refugees, not on oath, have stated that they were present at a distribution of bombs and machines for producing asphyxiating gas to the Bulgarians by the Germans and Austrians, who instructed the former how to utilize these instruments to exterminate the Serbian population. The Bulgarians used this method at Nish, Pirot, Prizrend and Negotin, the inhabitants of which places died of suffocation. Similar means were employed by the Austrians in several parts of Montenegro.

On June 25, 1942 the same newspaper went on to publish on its page 5, an identical article under the following title:

GERMANS MURDER 700,000 JEWS IN POLAND TRAVELLING GAS CHAMBERS

During the First World War, Bernhard Guttman was "correspondent and contributor to the Frankfurter Zeitung." On November 20, 1917 he met in Berlin with Richard von Kühlmann, state secretary in the Foreign Office. Von Kühlmann informed Guttman of his pessimism as to the progress and the outcome of the war. He complained of the behavior of the Bulgarians, who were allied to Germany and Austria:

[State Secretary von Kühlmann] reported how the Serbs are being "finished off" by them [the Bulgarians] with bureaucratic dispatch; they are brought, ostensibly to be cleaned, to delousing stations and eliminated with gas [*Schattenriss einer Generation* (1888-1919), Stuttgart: K. F. Köhler Verlag, 1950, p. 145-146].

I am seeking help from JHR readers able to provide additional information on this myth from the First World War, particularly in the form of research into contemporary press reports. Information might also be sought from the cultural services of Yugoslavia's embassies, consulates, and other agencies.

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